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Faithful To Our Calling Faithful To Our Lord

**An Affirmation in Two Parts
by
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri**

Part I

A WITNESS TO OUR FAITH

A Joint Statement and Discussion of Issues



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AN AFFIRMATION IN TWO PARTS

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THE FACULTY OF CONCORDIA SEMINARY

PART I

A WITNESS TO OUR FAITH:

A JOINT STATEMENT AND DISCUSSION OF ISSUES

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PREAMBLE

THE BACKGROUND OF THE DOCUMENT

For some time, we the Faculty of Concordia Seminary, have been encouraged by many in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to make a fresh statement of our faith and to address the issues under discussion in the Synod. On September 21, 1972, the District Presidents of our Synod encouraged each of the Professors of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis to assure the church of his Biblical and Confessional stance by setting forth (in writing) what he believed, taught and confessed "giving special attention to the theological issues among us today. In addition to providing the District Presidents with individual statements of our personal faith, we as a Faculty present the following document to the Church as a corporate expression of our faith and a discussion on the issues under debate. We deem it a great responsibility to be the teachers of future ministers of the Lutheran Church and, therefore, we consider it a welcome opportunity to meet the deep concern of all in our Synod by affirming the reason for the hope that is in us and by discussing openly the questions at issue in the Synod.

For us the Gospel is the Good News that Jesus Christ our Lord was born, died and rose for our salvation and for the salvation of the world. We affirm, moreover, that the Scriptures are the **norm** for faith and life. At the heart of the discussions in our Synod is the question of whether the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the sole source of our personal faith and the **center** of our public teaching. Is the Gospel alone sufficient as the ground of faith and the governing principle for Lutheran theology? Or is something else required as a necessary condition? It is our conviction that any effort, however subtle, to supplement the Gospel so that it is no longer the sole ground of our faith or the governing principle for our theology is to be rejected as un-Lutheran, contrary to our confession, and injurious to the mission of the Church.

The issue in the Synod is not academic freedom for the Faculty of Concordia Seminary but the need to stand fast in the Gospel freedom wherewith Christ has freed all members of His Church. That issue affects the work of every pastor and lay person as he carries out his calling according to his conscience as a Lutheran loyal to the Scriptures and the Confessions. Nor is the problem

a struggle between the Seminary and the present synodical administration. At stake is the centrality of the Gospel in our faith, our lives, our theology, our ministry, and God's mission to the world through us.

THE NATURE OF THE DOCUMENT

The **Affirmations** of faith which follow are grounded in the three central articles of the Nicene Creed which we all confess. The Faculty of Concordia Seminary subscribes to these **Affirmations** without reservation. These **Affirmations** make it clear that we teach and proclaim the Gospel within the framework of the doctrine of the Trinity as we have always done.

Quite different and distinct from the **Affirmations** are the **Discussions** of the issues. They are an illustration of how we treat the major subjects under discussion in our Synod. The **Discussions** are so named for good reason. They have been worded after serious discussion and reflection. We are not suggesting that each member of the Faculty binds himself to the precise wording of these **Discussions** as the only or the best way to formulate the answers. We are agreed that other wordings or expressions are not excluded. But we also agree that these **Discussions** present positions responsibly taken on the basis of our Scriptural and Confessional commitment. Within the household of faith we enjoy the freedom of the Gospel so that we are free to discuss and rework ancient and traditional formulations of doctrine. We also call these paragraphs **Discussions** because we look forward to further discussion of our efforts to express for our generation "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." Thus the **Discussions** provide us with a responsible set of statements which are suitable for use in discussion forums throughout the Synod.

This document illustrates how the Gospel governs our handling of theological topics. The Gospel is the center of our theology and our concern. We continue to affirm and uphold Article II of our Synod's Constitution, and we long for the day when these difficulties will be set aside and we can all work together with new zeal in the proclamation of the Gospel to all men and in the application of its power to the needs and crises of the world. To that end we commend these **Affirmations** and **Discussions** to the Church for its prayerful consideration.

AFFIRMATIONS OF FAITH

**WE PRAISE AND MAGNIFY OUR GOD,
THE FATHER, THE SON,
AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

**THE AFFIRMATIONS WHICH FOLLOW
EXPRESS THE FAITH WITHIN US THAT
LEADS US TO GLORIFY OUR GOD.**

**WE APPEAL TO ALL WHO HEAR THESE
WORDS TO UNITE WITH US IN A
COMMON CHORUS OF ADORATION.**

WE BELIEVE IN ONE GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY

We affirm that God the Father is our Creator. All things are in His hands and from His hands. From the beginning of all beginnings to the end of all ends, He is the one Source. From the smallest atomic particle to the greatest galaxy, He is the Maker. From the first ray of light to human beings made in His image, He is the Creator. His Spirit gives life to all things and constantly makes them new. His Word gives everything its identity and makes each item of creation unique. Each person, each people and each race is His special workmanship and is to

be honored as such. In His wisdom He gives purpose to all things He creates and declares them very good.

We affirm our lives as gifts of God. Our existence is totally dependent upon His goodness; we are not self-made. God, by His special creation, has selected us to be His personal representatives on earth and His chosen servants for all. We, in turn, are to be loyal to our Lord and Maker in every way and to unite with all His creation in a jubilant chorus of praise. But all human beings have sinned and thus have rejected their role as responsible servants. From the beginning their sin has been to defy God, to deny their calling as God's representatives, and to run their lives without Him. Hence human beings abuse creation instead of honoring it; they oppress their fellowmen instead of liberating them. Because of their sin all life is burdened with a curse, evil runs rampant, and even God's good creation may become His agent of terror.

We affirm that God the Creator is our Father. His wonders on our behalf never cease, for He never ceases creating. By His power He governs and directs all things for our good. His concern for creation is unfailing, His love for human beings means intervention on their behalf, and His will for the world is its total redemption. As children of our Father we affirm the goodness and glory of His creation, and we magnify His holy name. We are also called, according to our several opportunities and resources, to reflect His concerns by dealing with the issues of greed, pride, hunger, pollution, and other problems that face our world. But above all, God is our Father because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

WE BELIEVE IN ONE LORD, JESUS CHRIST

We affirm that Jesus Christ is the Promised One. In Him all the plans and promises of God are "yes" and "amen." The Word of God through whom all things were created assumed human form in Him. The glory of God once revealed to Israel is seen in Him. The Promise of God's grace announced to the Israelite people is finally fulfilled in Him. In Jesus Christ the Gospel of God's mercy and compassion is seen and heard as never before. He is the new beginning promised in the Old Covenant. He is

the center of God's Promise and God's ultimate revelation of Himself to the world. Jesus Christ is our Messiah, our Savior, and our Lord.

We affirm that for us and for our salvation, God sent His Son to become a human being. For us He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and born in Bethlehem, flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood, yet without sin. For us He traveled through Palestine, healed the sick, and preached the Good News of God's new age. For us He suffered under Pontius Pilate and was crucified on Golgotha. For us He died and was buried. For us He was raised from the dead on the third day as the firstfruits of those who have slept. For us He ascended to the right hand of God the Father to exercise His rule over all things. For us He will return in all His glory. In this Gospel message we rejoice.

We affirm that Jesus Christ is our Lord and our God. He is our Lord because He is our Redeemer. By His atoning life, death, and resurrection He frees us from the power of sin which enslaves us, and thereby He gives us a new identity. In Christ every Christian is a new creation. Jesus Christ is our Lord because He has destroyed the power of all evil forces that threaten our world and He has reconciled all human beings to the Father. By His rising to life again He set in motion the plan of resurrection that includes our resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ is our Lord because He is our God. All He has done for us is a gift of God's grace, and because His word to us is a promise, it can be received only by faith. For all of this our hearts are filled with thanks and adoration.

We affirm that we live by God's Promise. That Promise is the Gospel of God's love for us in Christ Jesus. God's Law, in whatever way it operates in our lives, reminds us of our guilt, our sinfulness, and our alienation from God, from God's creation, and from other human beings. That Law keeps accusing us. But the Promise of our Lord Jesus Christ always intervenes with the surprising message of God's forgiveness and our redemption. We are made free in Him in spite of any evidence to the contrary that we or others may see in our lives. That

experience is the marvel that shapes our lives. Our response to that miracle is to extend His Promise to others and to live a life pleasing to Him. Furthermore, together with Christ, we struggle to overcome those demonic forces once and for all defeated by our Lord that continue to manifest themselves in crime, oppression, racism, deceit, lovelessness, and other evils. To all who believe in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ He promised to send His Holy Spirit.

WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE

We affirm that the Holy Spirit is the Life-giving Spirit from God and that He is God. From the first creative acts of God to the daily renewal of our own spirits, the Holy Spirit is involved. The Spirit moved the prophets of Israel to speak God's message in terms of their daily life. Through the Holy Spirit the Word became a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, who after His resurrection imparted to His disciples that very same Spirit. At Pentecost He poured out the Holy Spirit on the entire community of God and continues to do so today. Through the Holy Spirit God has given us His Holy Scriptures to make us wise unto salvation and to be the norm for our faith and life. Through that Spirit we receive eternal life as a gift of God that transcends and transforms our present life. Because of our sinfulness we cannot by ourselves believe in Jesus Christ. But the Holy Spirit creates and confirms faith in us and makes us holy through the truth, inspires our worship, and intercedes for us when and the mutual encouragement of brothers and sisters in Christ. That same Spirit moves us to glorify our Maker and Redeemer.

We affirm that the church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head. He is constantly in the midst of His people. He comes to us anew whenever we hear His Promise and receive the forgiveness of sins. He baptizes us to new life and rescues us from eternal death. He shares with us His body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar and assures us of complete salvation. With Him we shall one day reign in glory with all the people of God. For amid all its diversities, the

Church is one. It consists of all Christian communities of all times and all places in which the Gospel is proclaimed and the Sacraments are administered according to the Word of our Lord. That oneness is the work of the Spirit, based upon the one hope to which we Christians are called, upon the one body, the one Lord, the one faith, the one Baptism, and the one God and Father of us all. The Church is God's community composed of human beings who are at the same time holy in Christ and sinners called to repentance. The Holy Spirit provides the Church with a variety of gifts, designates and empowers its ministers, leads us to the truth, ~~inspires~~ our worship, and intercedes for us when our words fail. >

We affirm that God summons every Christian to share in His mission to the world. The Spirit has equipped each one of us with unique gifts for service to God and the world. We are the people of God called to magnify the Father, to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to work for the reconciliation of all men with God and one another through the power of the Spirit. God created the Church to proclaim to the world the message that Christ is the one who liberates from all evil powers. For the Church is Christ's mission to the whole person, the whole Church, the whole society and the whole world. Wherever and whenever we Christians live by the Gospel we participate in God's work of renewing each person and society itself. As we labor to this end we await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the consummation of His kingly rule that shall have no end.

**TO HIM WITH THE FATHER AND
THE HOLY SPIRIT BE GLORY AND
HONOR FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.**

On November 21, 1972, Concordia's faculty resolved to "adopt the **Affirmations** as a statement of what we believe, teach and confess, and that we present these **Affirmations** to the church as assurance that we do indeed teach in accord with the doctrinal position of the LC-MS as set forth in Article II of the Constitution, and that we continue to stand under the norms of that article."

The faculty also resolved "that all the members of the faculty indicate their endorsement of the **Affirmations by signature.**"

Following the meeting, Dr. Robert Preus sent a letter with this request: "...list my name as opposing the joint confession."

Robert R. Bergt

William J. Danker

Robert W. Bertram

David E. Deppe

Herbert J. A. Bouman

Arlis J. Ehlen

Kenneth H. Breimeier

Alfred O. Fuerbringer

Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr.

Paul F. Goetting

Robert L. Conrad

Carl Graesser

John W. Constable

Robert A. Grunow

John S. Damm

Norman C. Habel

Frederick W. Danker

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George W. Hoyer

Arthur C. Repp

Holland H. Jones

Alfred von Rohr Sauer

Everett R. Kalin

Edward H. Schroeder

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Paul G. Lessmann

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Erwin L. Lueker

Arthur M. Vincent

Herbert T. Mayer

Carl A. Volz

Duane P. Mehl

Walter Wegner

Carl S. Meyer [†]

Robert J. Werberig

Eldon E. Pederson

Andrew M. Weyermann

Arthur Carl Piepkorn

Leonhard C. Wuerffel

DISCUSSIONS OF ISSUES

As indicated in the Preamble above, the **Discussions** which follow are quite distinct and different from the **Affirmations** to which we as a Faculty subscribe without reservation. The **Discussions** are submitted as a preliminary but responsible investigation and treatment of specific issues. The list of topics treated is not intended to be exhaustive but representative of those under discussion in our Synod. The **Discussions** of these topics are a demonstration of how we employ the Gospel as the governing principle in our theology. Individual members of the Faculty may express themselves differently as they formulate answers to these issues. But we, as a Faculty, agree that the principles employed in the following **Discussions** are Gospel-oriented and therefore Lutheran, and that these **Discussions** provide us with a responsible set of statements suitable for use in discussion forums throughout Synod. After each **Discussion** resources are provided to enable further study and discussion of these issues.

Of the nine **Discussions** which follow, the first three are related to the first set of **Affirmations** about God, the Father; the second three are related to the second set of **Affirmations** about Jesus Christ our Lord, and the final three **Discussions** are related to the third set of **Affirmations** about the Holy Spirit. The **Discussions**, therefore, should be studied in connection with the respective **Affirmations** to which they are related.

*Discussions One, Two and Three are dependent upon the first set of **Affirmations** about God, the Father, and are to be read in conjunction with those **Affirmations**.*

DISCUSSION ONE: **God's Creation and the Beginnings**

God the Father is indeed the Source of all life and the Creator of all things. But precisely how did our world take shape when He first created it? Did He create then the way He does now? Was His creation of the universe instantaneous or was it a lengthy process? Those are mysteries that have engaged the minds of scientists, the imagination of poets, and the faith of worshipers

for centuries. Each group strains with human words to describe God creating through His Word. Similarly biblical men of faith, operating with the same limitations of human language in a given culture, were moved by the Spirit to portray the creative work of God in diverse ways.

In Genesis 1, for example, the world is first depicted as a vast deep filled with water and covered with darkness. Then light appears as an entity distinct from the darkness, and the sky is introduced as an overarching firmament to separate the waters into those above the sky and those below. In Psalm 104, the deep is a wide expanse of water covering the highest mountains of earth. When God appears in all His splendor, He stretches out the heavens like a tent above and thunders at the waters below who flee from His presence. Elsewhere God's work of creation seems to involve the conquest of great sea monsters. (See Psalm 74: 12-17; Isaiah 51:9; Job 26.)

Each of these descriptions complements the other and emphasizes a different aspect of the mystery of creation. The first picture affirms that God, through His Word, gives separate identities to all things by creating our ordered universe out of darkness and chaos (compare Psalm 33). We meet that same creative Word in Jesus Christ, the true light who shines in the darkness of our world to give us each a new identity in Him (John 1). The second picture announces the glory and power of God the Creator when He creates or sends forth His Spirit to renew the face of the ground and when we respond to His creating with joyful adoration (compare Psalm 19; Job 38). The third picture asserts that creation also involves the liberation of our earth from the powers of chaos and points forward to Jesus Christ, the Firstborn of all creation who conquered the cosmic powers for us and reconciled all things to the Father through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1-2).

Through each of these descriptions God's spokesmen confront us with a message of God, not a textbook on science. They speak primarily to our faith rather than our intellect. These passages reflect the language of belief, not of scientific discourse. Any effort, therefore, to equate these descriptions of creation with a given scientific theory about the origin of the world is to be rejected. Likewise, any suggestion that a given

scientific theory about the origin of life or the structure of the universe is binding on believers merely because it is widely accepted is also to be rejected. At the same time, we recognize scientific research as another aspect of God's creative activity working through human beings. The biblical accounts of God creating the world, however, call for a response of praise and wonder, not biological or geological investigation.

In the last analysis, however, any discussion of the relationship of the biblical pictures of creation to scientific theories is secondary. For these biblical descriptions of God creating the world focus on the meaning of creation for us; they confront us with His glory, His goodness, and His goal for all creation. In them we are to discern ourselves, our needs, and our Creator at work around us and for us. But only through Jesus Christ, the creative Word alive among us, do we become new creatures who know by faith that all God's creating is working together for our good. As His children we respond to these pictures of God our Father at work with praise and wonder, not with arguments from reason. Through His Word all things have their beginnings and through His Word made flesh in Jesus Christ we have our new beginning.

For Further Study:

The Scriptures: Genesis 1-2; Psalms 8; 33; 74:12ff; 104; Job 26; 38; Proverbs 8; John 1; Hebrews 11: 1-3; Colossians 1-2.

The Confessions: *The Large Catechism*, *The Creed*, 9-24, 64; *Formula of Concord*, *Solid Declaration*, VII, 45.

Secondary Literature: Walter Wegner, "Creation and Salvation: A study of Genesis 1 and 2," *CTM*, XXXVII (1966), 520-542.

Walter R. Roehrs, "The Creation Account of Genesis," *CTM*, XXXVI (1965), 301-321.

C. F. W. Walther, "Why Should our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of our Church," tr. Alex W. Guebert, *CTM*, XVIII (1947), 241-253.

Secondary
Literature:

"Creation in Biblical Perspective," *CTCR*
Report 59.

DISCUSSION TWO:

God's Creation and Human Beings

Human beings are the glory and burden of God's creation. Not only have human beings been made a little lower than the angels and crowned with great honor, but they have also shown themselves to be creatures whose rebelliousness brings evil upon the world around them. They are chosen as servants of God to express His will in the management of the earth. They are distinct from all other creatures in that they are to reflect God's message to other human beings. From the beginning they have had the capacity to hear and respond to the Word that God addresses to them.

Human beings, however, also defy God and reject His Word, a fact which points to what we call "original sin." This sinfulness is present in every individual from the beginning of his existence as a human being and persists throughout his life. This sinfulness is the origin and source of all our sins of thought, word, and deed; it is that urging within each of us to usurp the role of God and deny our true character as His chosen creatures. Our sinfulness is such a deep-seated corruption that it cannot be understood or defined completely. With the *Book of Concord* we describe this "original sin" as our native inability to love God and trust in Him, coupled with an inclination to evil that even Christians can never fully conquer in this life.

This sinfulness is a reality we confront every day; we need a savior all the time. God, moreover, holds each person individually responsible for his own sinfulness and his own sins; the first human being is not accountable for my evil deeds. Nor is our native sinfulness identical with the humanity we inherit from our ancestors, but an attendant corruption of that humanity. We cannot argue that our sinfulness is not our fault, but Adam's. We know ourselves to be sinners because God's Word designates us as such, not by virtue of any rational argument that links our guilt with the guilt of our first parents

(*Smalcald Articles* III, I & II). We cannot blame them for our sinfulness or guilt.

Any consideration of Genesis 2-3 in this connection must take into account the kind of literature employed here and the intention of the biblical writer. We distinguish today between news reports, editorials, short stories, poems, dramas, and other types of literature and the various ways in which they communicate a message. The Holy Scriptures also include many different kinds of literature including poems, historical narratives, parables, and sermons. Regardless of what form of literature a given biblical writer may employ, his ultimate purpose is always to convey the Word of God to His people. A legitimate difference of opinion often exists among students of the Scriptures about the precise type of literature being employed or the extent to which a narrative is historical, poetic, or parabolic. Thus, for example, it is debatable whether the story of the Good Samaritan is a parable or a historical incident used by Jesus to communicate a message.

The discussion in our Church about Genesis 2-3 is a debate about the kind of literature found in this text rather than about its doctrinal content. Many within our Synod hold that these chapters are a literal historical account of the lives of two specific individuals known as Adam and Eve. Those who hold this position recognize that the message of the text deals with our native sinfulness. Our corruption is a reality that is as true for us as it was for our first parents.

Others in our Synod maintain that Genesis 2-3 is not an eye-witness report or a historical account similar to modern historical annals. They contend that the evidence within the text itself indicates that it is an ancient theological document which uses the narrative form. This text is more like a sermon than a news report. Anthropomorphisms, symbols, and theological reflection are integral to the character of these chapters. Thus any effort to press the details of this narrative according to the yardstick of modern historians is not consistent with the intent of the passage. The writer of Genesis 2-3 is proclaiming the truth about Everyman (*ha'adam*, "the man") and every woman (Eve, "Mother of all that live"). The intended addressee in this narrative is first of all Israel. In Adam and Eve all the men and

women of Israel could see themselves. But we too are addressed, for in that account our native sinfulness is revealed.

This kind of discussion is a legitimate part of the work of interpretation, and differences of opinion about the kind of literature involved do not negate the doctrinal content of the passage. For as we have indicated in the discussion above, the message remains the same whether we consider the text of Genesis 2-3 a literal historical account or some other kind of literature. Our corruption is as true for us as it was for the fallen parents of the human race.

Regardless of which position we take about the kind of literature found in Genesis 2-3, it is important for our preaching and teaching in the Church to recognize that our sinfulness is our own fault. For in the Old Testament, Israel is held responsible for its **own** crimes and corruption. In Romans 5, moreover, while Paul states that sin and death enter the world through one man, he makes it clear that the universal spread of sin and death takes place "because all men sin" (v. 12). In line with Paul's argument, it is also necessary for us to recognize that we share in the sin and death of the first human beings, regardless of how we interpret the details of Genesis 3. For our sinfulness is a dreadful reality revealed to us by the Word of God; so too is the reality that one man, Jesus Christ, makes us righteous by His righteousness.

For Further Study:

The Scriptures: Genesis 2-3; 9: 1-6; Ezekiel 28: 1-19;
Romans 5; Colossians 3: 1-11.

The Confessions: *Augsburg Confession* II, *Apology* II, *Smalcald Articles* III, 1; *Formula of Concord* 1; II.

Secondary Literature: Norman C. Habel, *The Form and Meaning of the Fall Narrative*. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Print Shop, 1965.

Secondary
Literature:

Ralph D. Gehrke, "Genesis Three in the Light of Key Hermeneutical Considerations," *CTM*, XXXVI (1965), 534-560.

Alfred von Rohr Sauer, "Man as Steward of Creation," *The St. Louis University Magazine*, XLIII (1970), 43-48.

DISCUSSION THREE: God's Creation and His Wonders

For us the miracle of all miracles is the promise God makes good through His Son Jesus Christ. For not only did God create all things, not only did He assume a human form in Jesus Christ, and not only did He raise Jesus Christ from the dead, but, wonder of wonders, He did it for us. He reconciled the world to Himself for us. In so doing He kept His promise to liberate us from the bondage of sin and death. For He has broken the inevitable cycles of life and death, sin and guilt, and crime and punishment in our lives. Because of Jesus Christ, He has suspended those terrifying laws of life in our relationship with Him. A miracle indeed! And that marvel is the focal point of our lives. For us any discussion of God's miracles or wonders in the Scriptures is dependent upon the centrality of this miracle for our faith and the relationship of this wonder to all other wonders.

We who have experienced this miracle see our universe as a world where wonders abound in the ordinary and the extraordinary. In concert with the Son and the Spirit, God the Father calls new wonders forth each day. Our very existence is a wonder of creation. But more than that, God created human beings to help keep this planet in order. Human beings are in a sense the balance wheel in the workmanship of God's earthly creation. But they have abandoned God as their center, and thereby they have disturbed the balance of our world. Now the very earth from which they came groans under the curse of their wanton acts of greed, violence, and pollution. It is the measure of the sin of modern human beings and their limited scientific view of things that they have largely become strangers to wonder and blind to the miraculous.

Hence, even when Christians today read the miracle accounts of the Scriptures, they are tempted to play down the supernatural elements as fantasy or to assume that God no longer performs spectacular miracles like those of the biblical era. Many are misled into focusing on a given miracle for its own sake. Either they measure it against the standards of modern scientific method and find the miracle wanting, or they demand an absolute acceptance of each detail of the miracle, precisely as it is reported, as a test of their own faith and the faith of others. Both approaches are misleading. The miracle accounts of the Scriptures are neither scientific reports nor tests of just how much we are willing to believe. These accounts, like the miracles they relate, are designed to lead human beings to the Creator and Redeemer behind the accounts. Only through the eyes of faith can His presence there be seen, and only from the perspective of the cross can the ultimate purpose of all miracles be discerned. To edify the Church, we ought to focus on this central meaning of the miracle accounts for us instead of dwelling on the authenticity of isolated miraculous details.

At the Red Sea, for example, God used a great man and a great wind to rescue His people from the Egyptians (Exodus 14). The stated goals of that event are that Yahweh would be glorified, that Israel would know that Yahweh was its God, and that His people would "see the salvation of Yahweh" (vv. 4, 13). The response of Israel was one of fear and faith in Yahweh (v. 31). We are invited to read this narrative with the same faith and from the same perspective of wonder as those who interpreted this miracle to later Israelites.

When Jesus fed the five thousand, He used ordinary bread for His extraordinary purposes. Yet His miracle was interpreted as a sign from God that He was sending a prophet into the world (John 6: 1-14). Later, Jesus' doubting disciples asked for another miraculous sign "that we may see and believe you" (v. 30); they reminded Jesus of the bread from heaven that Moses had provided Israel in the desert. But Jesus pointed His disciples away from the manna of Moses to God the Father who gives the bread from heaven, and away from the loaves of bread used in His own miracle to Himself as the living bread from heaven (vv. 35-51).

To follow Jesus Christ meant far more than accepting miracles as such; it meant believing that this carpenter of Galilee, the one sent from God for man's salvation, was the miracle. He had broken into the circle of their lives with God's promise of forgiveness and liberation. When Jesus fed the five thousand on a hillside in Palestine, the people experienced a miracle; but that miracle was important only as a means of leading them to know and trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Redeemer, and to recognize the coming of God's Kingdom. In our preaching and teaching, we are to use the miracle account for that same purpose.

For Further Study:

The Scriptures: Exodus 4; 14; 16; Numbers 21: 4-9; Deuteronomy 8; Matthew 12; 15:21-39; Luke 7: 1-17; John 6; 11; 20.

The Confessions: *Apology* XIII, 20; *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, VII, 25.

Discussions Four, Five and Six are dependent on the second set of Affirmations about Jesus Christ, our Lord, and are to be read in conjunction with those Affirmations.

DISCUSSION FOUR:

The Promise and The Scriptures

Where do we Lutherans begin when we engage in the theological enterprise? What is the basic presupposition with which we operate when we interpret the Scriptures? What is the governing principle with which Lutherans work when they approach a theological issue? A number of options have been proposed. We could appeal to an accepted tradition of the Church or depend on our collective human experience. We could begin with the assumption that the doctrine of scriptural infallibility guarantees the validity of our theology or our interpretation of the Scriptures. But to follow these approaches would not be Lutheran.

We, as Lutherans, start with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the center of the Scriptures, the heart of our theology, and the core of our lives. That conviction governs our interpretation of the Scriptures, the way we perform our task as theologians, and how we live. Because the Gospel is the center of the Scriptures, all of their parts must be understood in relationship to that center. The relative significance of each teaching of the Scriptures must be discerned by relating it to that center. Any tendency to make the doctrine of the inspiration or the inerrancy of the Scriptures a prior truth which guarantees the truth of the Gospel or gives support to our faith is sectarian. The Gospel gives the Scriptures their normative character, not vice versa. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, not through faith in Christ and something else, even if that something else be the Bible itself.

Our commitment to the Lutheran Confessions means that we adopt their governing theological principles and engage in the theological enterprise in the same way the confessors did. Hence we follow the lead of the Confessions in affirming the Gospel as the Good News of God's Promise (*promissio*). That Promise is more than a doctrine; it is the liberating reality in our lives. Through that Promise we have been brought into a living relationship with our Lord. Without that Promise we would never have known the grace of God or come to trust Him. With that Promise at the center of the Scriptures and the core of our lives, we are committed to carry out our theological task with the Promise as the normative center. The Gospel alone is the power of God for our salvation, and the Promise alone is the starting point for all our theology. Any teaching which does not maintain the absolute centrality of the Gospel in the interpretation of the Scriptures or the sole sufficiency of the Promise for our redemption is unbiblical and less than Lutheran.

This principle is illustrated by the way in which Article IV of the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* handles the relationship of "Law and Promise." Then, as now, the issue was raised by fellow Christians who cited strong scriptural evidence against the Lutheran position. Accordingly, Melancthon, who was the main drafter of the *Apology*, took their criticism seriously and subjected their evidence to close scrutiny. He discovered that they based their opposition on something else

than the Sacred Scriptures. Their thinking seemed to be governed by the bewitching power of the Law (*opinio legis*). The Law (*lex*) was indeed biblical; but they had raised to a saving truth what, though it is still truth, is not saving. The Law theme in the Scriptures does sometimes seem to contradict God's Promises. In places the Scriptures appear to deny that we are saved by faith without the "works of the Law." In Matthew 19: 19, for example, our Lord says, "If you would enter life, keep My commandments." How then does Melanchthon handle this dilemma?

He begins by performing the delicate operation of distinguishing the Law theme in the Scriptures from the Promise theme. What makes Melanchthon's operation so difficult is that there are passages which combine both Law and Gospel in an intricate way. His opponents, because they had erroneously given priority to the Law, had seen Law and Promise combined as a self-evident unity in these passages. Melanchthon insisted that we cannot start from anywhere in the Scriptures, no matter how true and divine they may be. We must start from the Scripture's own Promise, or we end up with a mixture which is neither Gospel nor Law. The Law enslaves and accuses, but the Gospel sets us free. The Law is found in the commandments of God which reveal His righteous will, show man how he ought to live to be acceptable to God, and threaten transgressors to the Law with His wrath. The Gospel reveals God's grace in Jesus Christ, announces God's willingness to accept the unacceptable sinner, and promises deliverance from the divine wrath that we sense.

Only by distinguishing properly between the themes of Promise and Law could Melanchthon relate them correctly so that Christ alone would be glorified and the gift of God's grace remain grace alone (*sola gratia*). The subordinate position of the Law is clearly seen when we understand that Jesus Christ kept its demands and assumed its curse for us. His victory over the Law puts the Law in its place — as a vanquished servant. It no longer has any claims on us. Any effort to fulfill its demands in order to gain favor with God makes the Law our taskmaster and renders Christ's victory insufficient and ultimately unnecessary. The Law is useful as a servant who gives us guidance on how to live a life pleasing to God, but none of its demands, however

subtle, can be made a prerequisite for receiving the Promise of Christ. We accept the Promise entirely on faith (*sola fide*).

Faith and Promise belong together. Throughout the biblical history, as in human experience generally, promises are made to be trusted. To make the Promise sure by efforts of our own is to make the Promise needless. Without faith as the only true response to the Promise, all of God's promises throughout biblical history are wasted. Then there is no need for Christ. Similarly, any approach to the Scriptures which focuses on the need for historical factuality rather than on the primary need for Christ leads us away from Christ rather than to Him. For Jesus Christ is the Promise which God kept for us. And that Promise is ours by faith alone, not by the verification of historical details.

The fact that a given biblical episode is historical is not important in and of itself. The importance of such historical events lies in what God was doing in and through them. We search them for the Promise; we look for what drives us to Christ. The clearest of all clear passages of the Scriptures are those which reveal the Promise in all its splendor. By that Promise we live, in its light we carry out our theological task, and from its orbit we interpret the Scriptures.

For Further Study:

The Scriptures: Romans 1-4; 1 Corinthians 1-4; Galatians 1-5; 1 Peter 1-2.

The Confessions: *Apology* IV; XII; *Formula of Concord* V.

Secondary Literature: John H. Tietjen "The Gospel and the Theological Task," *CTM*, XL (1969), 434-443.

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Literature:

Edward H. Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," *CTM*, XLIII (1972), 232-247.

Martin H. Franzmann, "Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics," *CTCR Report* 22. See also *CTM*, XL (1969), 235-246.

Erwin L. Lueker, "Justification in the Theology of Walther," *CTM*, XXXII (1961), 598-605.

Victor C. Pfitzner, "The Hermeneutical Problem and Preaching," *CTM*, XXXVIII (1967), 347-362.

Arthur C. Repp, "The Binding Nature of Synodical Resolutions for a Pastor or Professor of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," *CTM*, XLII (1971), 153-162.

DISCUSSION FIVE:

The Promise and Jesus Christ

What then is the Gospel that governs Lutheran theology? What is the precise nature of the Promise which determines our approach to the Scriptures and life? Before we give a description of God's Promise, it may be helpful to review what we normally mean by a promise and why the Confessions made a happy choice in selecting this term to express the character of the Gospel over against the Law. A promise, first of all, involves a personal relationship in which one person reaches out to another. Further, a promise is a welcome message given in good faith and accepted on faith. Behind the message there is usually a speaker with whom a past relationship of confidence has been established. Past communication or acts of good will have been part of that relationship. A promise, moreover, is a present word for the future on the basis of which the receiver of the promise can act. Such a promise imparts power. A promise at this level is not merely a passing agreement to keep an appointment or do an

assignment, but a word of commitment from the depths of someone's being.

What kind of promise is the Gospel of Jesus Christ? It involves the outreach of God to human beings in order to establish a new relationship of trust and good will. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have **eternal life**" (John 3:16). The Gospel, however, is more than the fact of God's outreach in Jesus Christ; it is also the message of His love, the good news that we are the ones to whom the Promise is extended. As such it has the **power** to liberate us and transform our lives. Nor is that Promise an empty agreement of good intent; it is grounded in the saving acts of God. These saving deeds are bound up with the hardcore events of human history: the liberation of Israelite slaves from Egypt, the birth of a carpenter's son in a manger at Bethlehem, the death of Jesus Christ on a Roman cross, and His resurrection to new life on the third day.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the central events of history by which God made good His promises and grounded all future promises. The message of that event is **the Promise**. It is not the historical fact that Jesus Christ died and rose again that by itself constitutes the Gospel, but that event together with the message of why the event happened. For Christ died and rose again to free us from all evil powers and to bring us back to God. Some insist on a public acceptance of the historicity of every detail of the life of Jesus as recorded by the evangelists, as if that were a test of our faith. The claim is made that if doubt is cast on the historical accuracy of one element of the Gospel narratives, then doubt is cast on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. That assertion is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the Gospel. For the Gospel is not merely a **report** of historical events that is addressed to our reason, but a **promise** grounded in historical events and addressed to our faith. A promise depends on a relationship of trust, not a series of rational proofs.

Even though we may not be able to harmonize historical discrepancies which appear in the New Testament Gospel accounts, that fact does not shake our faith or invalidate these

accounts as Word of God. Our faith rests in the promise of a faithful God, not in the accuracy of ancient historians. We know the Promise is true and our faith affirms it, because through that Promise we have come to know our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Any attempt to make the Promise dependent on the historical authenticity of every detail of the Scriptures destroys the Promise. We begin by listening to the Promise and hearing the message that "Jesus died and rose for me." If we keep asking, "Did Jesus really rise?" we will never hear the Promise. For proof of the resurrection will not lead us to believe the Gospel or trust God. Yes, we affirm that Jesus rose and that His grave was empty. But what counts is God's Promise that Jesus Christ died and rose for us and for our salvation. That is the Gospel and that word alone evokes faith.

Because the Promise is a deep mystery, a surprising outreach of God, and a dynamic message that changes lives, it is understandable that the biblical authors employ numerous images and themes to describe this Gospel work of God. In Mark, for example, Jesus Christ is sent by God to conquer the demonic powers and give His life as a ransom for many. John portrays Jesus as the "true light that enlightens every man," as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and as the one who overcame the world. Paul speaks of God in Christ "reconciling the world to Himself," "justifying the ungodly," rescuing us from the grip of sin, death, and the Law, and subduing all cosmic powers under His feet. Paul often uses the imagery of a law court while the writer to the Hebrews employs the language of worship, describing Jesus as the high priest who made expiation for our sins. The Lutheran Confessions usually refer to justification through faith and to the forgiveness of sins when they describe the heart of the Gospel.

This rich variety of biblical ways to portray the Gospel event enables us to address the Promise to many different situations of life and cultural contexts. This diversity becomes a problem only when one set of terms is pitted against another, or when one vocabulary is selected to tell the whole story. In the last analysis, the Gospel message is for each of us. God declares that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ He has acted in the past on our behalf and now promises to free us from any force that enslaves us. On the basis of that word we can

live and look to the future with confidence. Just as the Promise is worded in many ways, so it is communicated through several media. We hear it through the oral and the written Word, from parents and pulpit, and through Sacraments and worship. Rejoicing in this Promise, we fight against the imposition of any ecclesiastical, political, or social power that negates, threatens, or minimizes the freedom we have in the Gospel.

For Further Study:

The Scriptures: Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 1; 10:45; John 1; 10; 16:33; Acts 2; Romans 4-8; 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Galatians 2; Ephesians 2; Hebrews 2.

The Confessions: *Augsburg Confession* IV; XX; *Apology* IV, 53ff; *Formula of Concord* V; XII, 23.

Secondary Literature: Edgar Krentz, "Freedom in Christ — Gift and Demand," *CTM*, XL (1969), 356-368.

Walter R. Bouman, "The Gospel and the Smalcald Articles," *CTM*, XL (1969), 407-418.

Robert H. Smith, "Gospel Freedom," *CTM*, XL (1969), 338-345.

Robert Bertram, "The Lively Use of the Risen Lord," *CTM*, XLIII (1972), 438-441.

Walter R. Bouman, "History and Dogma in Christology," *CTM*, XLII (1971), 203-221.

Andrew M. Weyermann, "The Gospel and Life in Preaching," *CTM*, XL (1969), 444-453.

DISCUSSION SIX:

The Promise and the Old Testament

If we maintain that the Gospel is the norm and center of the Scriptures and that Jesus Christ is the heart of the Gospel, where is the connection and continuity between the Gospel and the Old Testament? The answer lies in the promises of God and the God who promises. In dealing with Old Testament materials, however, we must be careful not to leap prematurely into the New Testament to find the meaning of Old Testament passages. The Old Testament deserves to be thoroughly studied on its own terms and in its own historical context first of all. Only then will we be able to appreciate the way in which God actually worked through His promises to complete His plan of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The Promise in the Old Testament assumes many forms. Adam is given a new lease on life despite his fall. Cain bears a mark of God's protection. Noah finds grace in the eyes of Yahweh, is rescued from the flood, and receives a promise of God's concern for all men. Abraham is promised a land of his own, national greatness, numerous seed, and the privilege of mediating God's blessing to other nations. Israel's liberation from Egypt was the fulfillment of Yahweh's promises to the patriarchs and the disclosure of Himself as the Redeemer of oppressed people. By establishing His covenant with Israel, Yahweh made Israel His own people and promised them the blessing of a full life with Him. Those who trusted Yahweh and His promises lived in the right relationship with their Lord and experienced His grace (Genesis 15:6). On the basis of these and similar demonstrations of God's acts and mercy, the prophets and psalmists of Israel spoke of His help for the present and His word of hope for the future. For Yahweh had shown Himself to be faithful and His promises to be inexhaustible.

In His covenant with David, Yahweh fulfilled old promises to Abraham and added new promises of mercy. He promised David a child who would be designated His son, who would build a house for Yahweh, and whose dynasty would be eternal. By being anointed King over Israel, David was designated an anointed one, or "Messiah." Many "messiahs" like David ruled over Israel. Those promises which refer specifically to a future

anointed King are known as messianic. In addition to messianic expectations, we meet promises about a future prophet like Moses, a suffering servant, and a remnant of Israel. Sometimes these and similar promises are also called messianic, in spite of the absence of this designation for them with the Scriptures themselves. In this **Discussion**, however, the term is not used in this broader sense.

Solomon was the first fulfillment of the messianic promise to David; similar fulfillments were announced by Isaiah. He spoke of a young woman of his day giving birth to a child named Immanuel and of a future royal figure with throne names like "Mighty God" and "Prince of Peace." In some passages the imagery employed in these messianic hopes leaps beyond the limitations of the Israelite kings to a new reign of God in the future. Some of Yahweh's promises to Israel include specific predictive elements relevant to the history of His ancient people, while others are deep expressions of His assurance that the future was in His hands and that all His acts of mercy were moving toward a new and dramatic climax. The fulfillment or non-fulfillment of isolated promises of Yahweh at certain moments in Israel's history in no way nullified either the truth of the original assurance or the ultimate fulfillment of the Promise in Jesus Christ. Nor does the fact that the ancient Israelites may not have known the precise identity of Jesus of Nazareth or the full implications of His coming render their faith in the Promise of God any less valid and salutary.

Jesus Christ is the climax, center, and surprising finale in God's plan of salvation for His people. He is more than a fulfillment of those exclusively messianic promises from the Old Testament which many at the time of Jesus interpreted in a narrow nationalistic manner. Jesus was also the prophet like Moses, but much more. He was truly a son of David, but far greater even than David. He was the true Israel, the suffering servant, the last Adam, the Son of Man and the very Son and Word of God incarnate. He is the expected fulfillment of the Old Covenant age and the surprising beginning of the new age. In Him all the promises, plans, and assurances of Yahweh are fulfilled; He brings the history of the old Israel to a close and ushers in the new age of God's Kingdom. His life, death, and resurrection for the reconciliation of all men with God affirm

the truth of all God's past acts of liberation and mercy. A Christian will follow the lead of our Lord (in Luke 24: 13-32) and trace the word and works of God through to their ultimate manifestation in the Christ event. In the light of their fulfillment a new dimension is added to the meaning of Old Testament promises of God. For the message of Jesus Christ is both the good news of God's new work of liberation and the key for unlocking the secret of God's dealings with Israel.

The Gospel, therefore, is the power which unites the Old and New Testaments. Salvation comes by faith in the Promise, whether it be found in Yahweh's faithful acts of mercy and promises of redemption to ancient Israel, or in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus which accomplishes the salvation of all who believe.

For Further Study:

The Scriptures: Genesis 12: 1-2, 15: 1-6, 17; 18: 1-19;

Exodus 6:2-8; 14; 19: 3-6; Joshua 24; 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 22:6-13; Psalms 72, 110; Isaiah 7: 1-17; 9: 2-7; 11: 1-9; Micah 5: 1-6; Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Ezekiel 36-37; Daniel 7; Hosea 11; Matthew 1-2; 12; 16: 13-28; 21: 1-11; Luke 7: 1-23; John 6: 32-51; Acts 2; 7; Romans 4; 5; 9-11; Galatians 3; Hebrews 1; 1 Peter 2.

The Confessions: *Apology* IV, 53-60; XII, 53-58; *Formula of Concord* V, 23.

Secondary Literature: Martin H. Franzmann, "The Hermeneutics of Fulfillment: Is. 7:14 and Matt. 1:23," *A Project in Biblical Hermeneutics*, published by the CTCR (1969), 19-38.

Walter R. Roehrs, "The Typological Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament," *A Project in Biblical Hermeneutics*, published by the CTCR (1969), 39-56.

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Literature:

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Ralph Klein, "Aspects of Intertestamental Messianism," *CTM*, XLIII (1972), 507-517.

Norman C. Habel, "The Gospel Promise to Abraham," *CTM*, XL (1969), 346-355.

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Alfred von Rohr Sauer, "Problems of Messianic Interpretation," *CTM*, XXXV (1964), 566-574.

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Arlis Ehlen, "Old Testament Theology as *Heilsgeschichte*," *CTM*, XXXV (1964), 517-544.

Discussions Seven, Eight and Nine are dependent upon the third set of Affirmations about the Holy Spirit and are to be read in conjunction with those Affirmations.

DISCUSSION SEVEN:

The Holy Spirit and the Mission of Christ

Our Crucified and Risen Lord appeared to His disciples on the evening of His resurrection and gave them the great mission command, "As my Father has sent me, so I send you." With that imperative He also gave His disciples the power to carry on the mission that His Father had given to Him by breathing on them and saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20: 19-23). At Pentecost the same Spirit was poured out upon His disciples, enabling them to proclaim the Gospel to people from diverse lands and races. The message they heard is summed up by

Peter, "Know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). The same commission, message, and power is given to God's Church today. As the Father sent His Son, so the Son sends us on His Father's mission. Our message is the Gospel, the Promise of salvation to all who believe that Jesus is Liberator and Lord. Our power is the Holy Spirit working to motivate and liberate God's people for His mission through the Church's ministries of proclamation, witness, service, worship, and nurture.

The Gospel message which lies at the heart of our mission work today will always remain a scandal. The one whom God made both Lord and Christ was a crucified Jewish carpenter from Galilee. The saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, however, is for all the world. For God became a true man at a particular time and place for the sake of all people in all times and all places. That means for St. Paul the missionary, that, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9: 22). Thus the message of the Gospel may be expressed in the language and thought patterns of every culture that all might have the opportunity to hear and be saved. As our fathers formulated the Christian message in terms of the culture and speech of their day, so African, Asian, and Latin American Christians today are free, under the guidance of the Spirit, to express the Gospel in ways that are meaningful to people in their communities.

We, in turn, need to dialogue with these Christians from non-Western cultures so as to hear from them the message of the Gospel and discern anew what is central and what is secondary for the preaching of the Gospel in the world today. In all of this we must trust the Spirit to lead Christians of all cultures into all truth and not try to impose our particular way of wording the Gospel upon them. We affirm the Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of God's Word; our Confessions, however, are not intended to be barriers between denominations, but bold affirmations of Christ, His Gospel and the unity of His Church.

We who have been called by the Spirit know that in Christ there is no barrier between Jew and Greek, American and Russian, black and white, man and woman. We are one in the Lord. The Gospel of God's grace is offered to all. Christ

came to break down the dividing wall of hostility between races, between peoples, and between communities. Where that has not yet happened among us, we are called to struggle with Christ in breaking down these barriers. At the same time our Creator reminds us to honor and maintain the identity of all people and races He has created. We dishonor Him if we try to remake them in our own image by denying or degrading their character, color, or culture, and by imposing our own.

God's mission involves more than the formal preaching of the message of eternal salvation through the Gospel. Through whatever means the Gospel is proclaimed, God not only rescues people for eternal life hereafter, but sends His Spirit forth that they might have freedom in Christ here and now. That same Spirit prompts us to share the blessings God has given us. Those blessings include the power we have because of our possessions, our education, our heritage, our standing in society, and our political rights. Will we use this power for the liberation or the oppression of others? The white Christians of the Western world who possess such enormous power and wealth are called to use them in the promotion of the Gospel and in the service of human beings.

When the Gospel becomes the motivation for a new life and a new creation among God's people, they join Christ in struggling to overcome the evil forces which He defeated by His death and resurrection. These demonic powers continue to manifest themselves in crime, apathy, racism, oppression, deceit, and lovelessness. Those who follow in the steps of our Lord are called to confront the gainsayers of our time with the truth, to heal the lepers and lame of our day while we speak God's message of forgiveness, to be ready to share our wealth with the hungry of the world while we proclaim the Gospel, and to share our power with those oppressed while we announce the message of Christ the Liberator. For God's mission involves the liberation of human beings from all evils by the power of the Gospel. On that mission God has sent us in the power of His Spirit.

For Further Study:

The Scriptures: Genesis 12: 1-3; Isaiah 42: 1-9; 49: 1-13; 61: 1-7; Matthew 12: 15-28; 28: 16-20; Luke 10; John 17; 20: 19-23; Acts 1-2; 10; 1 Corinthians 9: 19-23; Romans 10; Ephesians 2; 4: 1-16; James 2.

The Confessions: *Apology* XV, 43; XII, 174; *Large Catechism, The Ten Commandments*, 179-310.

Secondary Literature: *The Mission Affirmations* adopted by the 46th Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, June 1965.

John H. Elliott, "The Particularity of the Gospel: Good News for Changing Times," *CTM*, XL (1969), 369-378.

Roland E. Miller, "The Gospel and the Mission Task of the Church," *CTM*, XL (1969), 465-481.

Lorenz Wunderlich, "The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life," *CTM*, XXVII (1956), 753-764.

Kenneth Siess, "The Gospel Approach to Counseling," *CTM*, XL (1969), 454-464.

William J. Danker, "The Relationship Between Graduate Theological Education and the Worldwide Mission of the Church," *CTM*, XLIII (1972), 329-337.

William J. Danker, "Retreat from Mission," *Seminar*, December 1972.

Won Yong Ji, "Evangelization and Humanization," *CTM*, XLII (1972), 163-172.

R. Pierce Beaver, "The Christian Mission, a Look into the Future," *CTM*, XLII (1971), 345-352.

DISCUSSION EIGHT:

The Holy Spirit and the Community of God

If the Gospel is the center of the Scriptures, is the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures rendered irrelevant? Far from it! One of the pillars of Lutheran theology is that the Spirit and the Word belong together. But how? What is the connection between the written Word and the Spirit? How do the Scriptures portray the Spirit operating in the community of God to communicate His will? What is the relationship of the work of the Holy Spirit to the message of the Gospel? Does the inspired character of the Scriptures guarantee the truth of the Gospel and the complete inerrancy of all materials in the Scriptures? These are but some of the related questions raised in this debate.

In the Scriptures inspiration is always in the service of God's ultimate purpose. Whenever God inspires a member of His community, He thereby motivates and enables that individual to follow His directives. Moses and the seventy elders were inspired so that they could lead Israel through the wilderness. Balaam was moved by the Spirit to pronounce a blessing on the Israelites. When the Spirit filled Gideon and Jephthah, they were given the ability to perform heroic acts of deliverance. The Spirit is also the power which moved men and women to speak the Word of God. When David spoke by the Spirit, he claimed to be speaking the Word of God. Through the Spirit, Micah had the power to declare to Israel its transgression, and Ezekiel had the capacity to discern God's will for His people. Frequently, however, the prophets of Israel describe the Word of God alone as both the impulse and the import of their preaching. Thus in the Old Testament, the Word of God and the Spirit of God are pictured as the same dynamic power of God operating through His spokesmen to fulfill His redemptive purposes for His community.

All Old Testament words and spokesmen of God are the prelude to the Word God spoke to us by His Son Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1: 1-2). He is the living Word, the Word made flesh. He speaks God's Word to us, and He imparts God's Spirit to His disciples. The Word and the Spirit cannot be divorced from the historical Jesus Christ. Paul makes the connection

between Christ and the Spirit explicit when he affirms that what Christ wrought in him was by the power of the Spirit, a power that enabled him to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 15: 17-19). Paul's proclamation of Jesus Christ and Him crucified was a demonstration of the power and Spirit of God in his preaching. Our confessions follow this biblical lead when they insist that the Spirit and the Word belong together, and that the Spirit works ordinarily through the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in order to create and strengthen faith in Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus Christ, moreover, who promised and sent the same spirit to inspire His disciples. The task of the Spirit, according to Jesus, was to bear witness to Him, to enlighten the minds of His disciples concerning the events of His earthly ministry, and to guide them into the truth so that Jesus Christ would be glorified. Thus the Spirit sent by Jesus Christ also leads human beings back to Him by working through the apostles and their words. The Spirit imparted by Jesus Christ to His disciples is the same Spirit by which the prophets spoke and were moved to inquire about the Promise of salvation through the Christ who was to come. For the Spirit is the living, active power of God working through the Word to lead human beings to Jesus Christ, whether that Word be written or oral, in the Old Testament Promise or the New Testament Gospel. Accordingly, the inspiration of the written Word pertains to the effective power of the Scriptures to bring men and women to salvation through the Gospel. We affirm, therefore, that the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God.

An appreciation of the dynamic role of the Holy Spirit working through the Word is helpful for interpreting 2 Timothy 3: 16, which has become a classic text for the doctrine of inspiration. This text is the only biblical reference which actually applies the term "inspired" to the Sacred Scriptures as such. The "writings" referred to in the context are clearly the writings of the Old Testament, probably in the Greek translation (Septuagint) used by the New Testament writers. The Greek term used to describe the "inspired" character of these writings is *theopneustos* ("God-breathed" or "God-breathing"), a term which occurs only here in the Scriptures. Wherever the Spirit is at work, God's power is actively accomplishing His purposes.

The breath of God working in and through the Scriptures expresses the same idea. For, as a result of this divine in-breathing, the Scriptures have the capacity to teach, reprove, and edify the community of God. All of this is true because, first of all, the Scriptures are able through the Spirit "to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3: 15).

Throughout the Scriptures little is said about precisely how the prophets or apostles were inspired. The Spirit is seen as the living power of God accomplishing His purposes through them; and His ultimate purpose is the salvation of all men through Jesus Christ. To focus on the how of inspiration, therefore, is to divert our attention from the Christ to whom the Spirit directs us. In achieving God's purposes, the Spirit operates with men and women who are limited and conditioned by the culture and language of their times. The Word of Promise was spoken amid the ambiguities of human lives and within the limitations of human language. Yet the Word always gets through to God's community, and His Promise is true for all who believe it. They can rely on that Word through which the Spirit works. Because of the Gospel we affirm the reliability of the Scriptures, not vice versa. We believe the Scriptures because we believe in Jesus Christ. He is the one who interprets the Father to us; He is the key to understanding the Scriptures.

The historical character of the Scripture means that we cannot demand that the biblical authors possess the same knowledge of science or geology as we do, or that they operate with the same criteria of what is history or accuracy. The reliability or "inerrancy" of the Scriptures cannot be determined by twentieth century standards of factuality. Nor do the Scriptures link the work of the Holy Spirit with this kind of "inerrancy." The purpose of the Spirit imparted by our Lord is to lead us into the whole truth about what God was doing in Jesus Christ, that we might be redeemed and He may be glorified. In disclosing that Truth God does not err, and in achieving that purpose the Spirit active in the Word does not lead us astray; to that the Spirit within us bears witness.

For Further Study:

The Scriptures: Exodus 31: 1-3; Numbers 11: 16-30; 24: 1-4; Judges 6:34; 1 Samuel 10: 1-13; 1 Kings 18: 12; 2 Kings 2: 9-16; Micah 3: 5-8; John 14: 15-26; 16: 1-15; 20: 22-23; Acts 4: 8-13; 6: 1-10; 8: 14-19, 29; 9: 17-18; 11: 23-28; 13: 1-4, 9; 19: 21; 20: 22-28; 1 Corinthians 12; 14; Ephesians 4: 1-16; 2 Timothy 1: 8-14.

The Confessions: *Augsburg Confession* III; V; *Smalcald Articles* III, IV; VIII; *Apology* XII, 44; XIII, 12-13; *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, XI, 52-58; *Large Catechism, The Creed*, 34-59.

Secondary Literature: "Statement on the Inspiration of the Scriptures," adopted by the *CTCR*, 1965. See *A Project in Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 11-15.

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DISCUSSION NINE:

The Holy Spirit and the Teaching Activity of the Church

As the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit bears witness to and glorifies Jesus, enables human beings to call Jesus both Christ and Lord, declares to the people of God everything that Christ has received from the Father, and guides Christ's followers into all the truth by recalling to them the apostolic witness to the words and acts of Christ. The Spirit does this through the various agencies of teaching that the Church has at a given time and place in its history. These agencies include the worship of the Church through its creeds, liturgies, and hymns; the living Word that the ministry of the Church proclaims; the Sacraments; the written Scriptures; the Church's educational institutions at all levels; and the mutual conversation and consolation of Christian brothers and sisters. The ability to teach is something that the Church is to look for in those whom, under the Spirit's guidance, it selects for positions of oversight and leadership (1 Timothy 3: 2; 4: 13-14; Titus 1: 9). The choice of teaching methods is dictated not by the Scriptures, but by the circumstances.

The Sacred Scriptures lay down no rules for interpretation and prescribe no method for communicating the message of the Scriptures to successive generations of Christians. The Scriptures are in a unique sense the written word of God and deserve due reverence. But the fundamental principles of interpretation, such as "a text must be studied in the light of its literary context," "Scripture interprets Scripture," "each passage has

one literal sense," "all features of the text must be interpreted in their historical milieu," are not laid down in the Scriptures. Furthermore, these rules are not unique to the study of the Scriptures, but apply to the interpretation of any ancient document. As Lutherans, however, we operate with certain presuppositions when we approach the Scriptures. These include: 1) the centrality of the Gospel in the Scriptures; 2) the distinction between the Law, which always accuses, and the Promise, which always assures; 3) the Spirit's gift of faith as the prerequisite to receive the Promise and obey the commandments of God.

In its long history, the Church has used many methods of interpreting the Sacred Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit has been able to work graciously through them all. Examples include the Antiochene school of exegesis (historical, grammatical, influenced by Aristotle) and the rival Alexandrian school (allegorical, mystical, influenced by Platonic philosophy); the four-fold sense the medieval exegetes expected to find in every passage of the Scriptures; and the various "historical" methodologies (including the "historical-grammatical" and the "historical-critical") since the Reformation. Sometimes two contrasting methods proved to be complementary. As the weakness of a method became manifest in the encounter of the Church with new situations, the Church gradually abandoned or modified the method to accommodate new insights. In these situations, there were always some who believed that the abandonment of a given method meant the destruction of the biblical message. Experience has shown that no method is without its perils and that no method can guarantee that an exegete will infallibly disclose **all** the facets of God's intended message.

The Church is in its essence historical! That means that it will preserve elements of the past and be influenced by new insights. Without the former, the Church loses stability and a continuity with the past that is integral to its life. Without the latter, the Church stagnates and loses its effectiveness in dealing with new situations. But whether it conserves the old or adopts the new, the judgment of the Church is always human and hence under the judgment of God. The Church is also called to be critical. It discriminates between false spirits of deceit or legalism and true spirits which confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh

for our salvation. It discerns changes in cultural conditions and deliberates on the best way to speak God's message to the changed conditions. Criticism does not mean sitting in judgment over others, but involves making a studied decision on the basis of all available evidence. The Church weighs the evidence from ancient languages and archaeology to determine the best translation of the Sacred Scriptures. Similarly, the decision of each Lutheran pastor and church to affirm the Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of the Sacred Scriptures is ideally a judgment based on a careful first-hand evaluation of the *Book of Concord*.

In and of itself so-called "historical-critical" methodology is neutral. The findings of those who use such methodology will be reflected in their presuppositions. These presuppositions may be reverent, or they may be destructive. Part of our present problem lies in the fact that some of us remember that the opponents of Christianity were among the first to make extensive use of historical criticisms to call the Church's faith and the Church's Scriptures into question. We have at the same time tended to forget that in other situations other foes of Christianity have used other methods of interpretation to try to refute and ridicule the Church's faith.

Basically all the techniques associated with "historical-critical" methodology, such as source analysis, form history, and redaction history, are legitimated by the fact that God chose to use as His written Word human documents written by human beings in human language. That is, He employed human forms of communication to disclose to human beings what they need to know and believe about God and about His will for the salvation of all human beings. Because of the wealth of information about the biblical milieu that we are privileged to possess, "historical-critical" methodology provides us with valuable insights into the intended meaning of the written Word of God as we have it. Neither the Sacred Scriptures nor the *Book of Concord* enjoins a particular method as the only way of interpreting the Scriptures. When we use "historical-critical" methodology we do so on the basis of Christian presuppositions. So employed, it has brought great blessings to the Church and deepened the Church's appreciation of the written Word of God.

The process of teaching is a mutual one. We learn from other human beings. God did not invest all His graces in a single person or in a single part of divided Christendom. We have an obligation both to learn from one another and to teach one another. We must listen as well as bear witness, and as additional insights recommend themselves to us as true, we must integrate them into our formulated theology. To be able to do so calls for diligent prayer, for a patient and expectant listening to the Holy Spirit's guidance, for withholding premature judgments, for mutual generosity, for a deep concern for the convictions of fellow-Christians inside and outside our own communion, for sober realization that the purpose of our teaching is to enable fellow human beings to find God's truth, and for gratitude to Him for every new insight that he allows us to gain.

For Further Study:

The Scriptures: Deuteronomy 18: 15-22; 26; Nehemiah 8: 1-12; John 16: 12-15; 17; Acts 10; 1 Corinthians 2; Galatians 4: 21-31; 1 Timothy 3-4; 2 Timothy 3: 10-17; Titus 1: 5-9; 1 Peter 1: 10-12.

The Confessions: *Augsburg Confession*, V; *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Summary Formulation*, 1-13; *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, V, 1; XI, 90-92; *Apology* IV, 12, 183-286.

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Professors Mark Bangert, Ralph Bohlmann, and Martin Scharlemann were on leave and off campus at the time of the publication of these documents. Professor Arlis Ehlen, though not teaching, was on campus and was invited by the faculty to join them in offering a confession of his faith to the church.

REPRINTS of *Faithful to Our Calling-Faithful to Our Lord* are available at cost. Extra copies of Part I, "A Witness to Our Faith" containing the faculty's joint statement and discussion of the issues can be ordered at .75 per copy. Extra copies of Part II, "I Believe" faculty members personal confessions of faith and discussion of issues are available at \$1.25 each. Address your requests to: Office of Seminary Relations, Concordia Seminary, 801 De Mun Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri 63105. Please make checks payable to Concordia Seminary.